

Occupational Therapy and Concussion

What is Occupational Therapy?

Life is made up of meaningful everyday activities or occupations, such as walking the dog, gardening, preparing a meal, painting, doing the laundry and playing games. Occupations are part of life; they describe who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Occupations help bring meaning to life.

When we cannot participate in daily occupations, due to injury, illness, disability or social and environmental circumstances, occupational therapists help find solutions to address the meaningful everyday activities of life. Occupational therapy also helps prevent disability or illness and enhances the way we participate in our communities and lives. Occupational therapy helps us engage in the occupation of living.



What is a concussion and what are the signs and symptoms?

A concussion is a brain injury caused by excessive, rapid movement of the brain inside the skull. Concussion can result from a direct blow to the head, face or neck or an indirect hit or injury that has enough force to jostle the brain. A concussion can result in and can include a range of physical (e.g., headache, nausea, dizziness), cognitive (e.g., decreased attention, slowed reaction time, memory difficulties etc.), emotional/behavioural (e.g., irritability, sadness, anxiety etc.) and sleep-related (e.g., increased sleep, difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep etc.) Signs and symptoms can be immediate or delayed (e.g. hours, days etc.). Although there are typical signs and symptoms, each person may experience a concussion differently.

According to Statistics Canada, over 94,000 concussion and related brain injuries are reported each year. Nearly a third of reported concussions occurred among 12 to 19 years. Sixty percent of those concussions are sports-related. Every year, a large number of concussions are not reported.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapy recognizes that everyday occupational engagement influences mental and physical health. Occupational therapists believe that occupational performance, organization, choice and satisfaction are determined by the relationship between persons and their environments. Occupational therapists approach concussions with this unique perspective that considers a person's needs within context of family, daily activities and community.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Work with clients and their families to identify the occupations and activities that are important for family, personal and work/school life.
- Help the client return to daily activities (school, work, sports and leisure, social life, etc.) safely and in a way that would allow the client to recover from their concussion.
- Help clients rebuild confidence in their daily lives after a concussion.
- Provide education for energy conservation and relaxation techniques.
- Provide recommendations and build strategies for communities, stakeholders and decision makers on the development of concussion education and rehabilitation programming.

Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places, such as long term care facilities, community support services, family health teams, hospitals and clients' homes. Occupational therapists also work with organizations, such as government, policy makers, care providers and community agencies to develop programs and resources.

Occupational therapy works!

My name is Shanif and my 12-year-old daughter sustained a concussion while playing in our community soccer league. She experienced several weeks of headaches, fatigue and had trouble concentrating. She was unable to attend school, play sports or socialize with her friends without making her symptoms worse. She just wasn't the same. We met with an occupational therapist in our community. The occupational therapists took the time to find out what activities were most important to my daughter and our family. He helped her to plan her days so that she was able to rest appropriately and avoid doing too much too soon and worked with us to figure out how best she could return to her daily activities (school, sports, social life, etc.) safely and in a way that would allow her to recover from her concussion in the best way possible. My daughter is doing much better. The occupational therapist helped my daughter get back to doing all of the things she needs, wants and loves to do. Because of occupational therapy, we have our daughter back!